

FRENCH BROAD RIVER BASIN

The Cherokee Indians already had countless names for the French Broad River by the time white hunters first approached this mountain region. Their river was “Long Man” and its tributaries “Chattering Children.”



The settlers were more literal in their naming of the river. They had already encountered wide streams, or “broads,” that flowed away from the ocean that they or their parents had crossed. But this river ran northwest, into what was then French territory, and eventually joined the mighty Mississippi. To the newcomers, it was plainly the French Broad.

The headwaters of the French Broad River spill from a 50-foot waterfall in Transylvania County. Known as Court House Falls, the waterfall rushes into a creek that feeds the North Fork, which joins the West Fork near Rosman and eventually the Middle and East forks to form the French Broad. About half of the land surrounding these headwater streams is forested, with much of the basin within the Pisgah National Forest or Pisgah Game Lands. Steep slopes limit the land area suitable for building and farming. In fact, the tallest mountain east of the Mississippi River rises from this basin—Mount Mitchell stretches 6,684 feet skyward. Cold Mountain, immortalized by the novel and film of the same name, rises 6,030 feet above the Shining Rock Wilderness area.

The French Broad River Basin drains land in both North Carolina and Tennessee. Besides the French Broad River, the basin includes two other major watersheds in North Carolina: the Pigeon and Nolichucky rivers—tributaries that join the French Broad in Tennessee. The Mills, Davidson and Swannanoa rivers are major tributaries of the French Broad River in North Carolina.

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BILL LEA



profile:

Total miles of streams:
3,985

Total acres of lakes:
1,736

Municipalities within basin: 24

Counties within basin: 8

Size: 2,830 square miles

Population:
393,795
(2000 U.S. Census)

The French Broad originates from a tiny waterfall (left); the basin's Mount Mitchell is the tallest peak in the East (below).